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ABSTRACT

This is an investigation of the impact that a volunteer-based violence prevention program is having in a large urban school district located in the Midwest. The program addresses behavioral and violence prevention issues in the school setting with the hopes of reducing the factors that might put a student at-risk for school failure. The long-term benefits might be expressed in the students' lives as they continue their schooling and as they become productive citizens. The benefits of the program activities were observed when participating students and teachers expressed their perceptions about different dimensions related to their educational endeavors. Since the dosage of intervention is limited in time and duration, it was recommended to re-assess those dimensions of the program implementation. Recommendations for further research are included in the discussion section. (Contains 19 references and 4 tables.) (Author/GCP)

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Running Head: VOLUNTEERS AND SCHOOLS

Volunteers and Schools Nurturing Developmental Assets: Promoting Positive Attitudes and Behaviors while Protecting Youth from High-Risk Behaviors

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Abstract

This is an investigation of the impact that a volunteer-based violence prevention program is having in a large urban school district located in the Midwest. The program addresses behavioral and violence prevention issues in the school settings with the hopes of reducing the factors that might put a student at-risk for school failure. The long-term benefits might be expressed in the student life as they continue their schooling and as they will become productive citizens. The benefits of the program activities were observed when participating students and teacher expressed their perceptions about different dimensions related to their educational endeavors. Since the dosage of intervention is limited in time and duration, it was recommended to re-assess those dimensions of the program implementation. Recommendations for further research are included in the discussion section.

Keywords: At-risk students, conflict resolution, violence prevention, mentoring, volunteer organization

Volunteers and Schools Nurturing Developmental Assets: Promoting Positive Attitudes and Behaviors while Protecting Youth from High-Risk Behaviors

This study was an evaluation of a volunteer violence prevention program in the 26th largest school district in the US. The district serving as the research site was a large urban district located in the Midwest. The school district serves more than 96,000 students from preschool to grade 12. The school district vision is designed to assure that every student acquire the fundamental academic and life skills necessary for success in the classroom and workplace. The district vision commits the school system to educate each student to the highest academic standards while ensuring attention to non-cognitive measures such as attendance and discipline.

Violence prevention in schools is not a new subject in the educational arena (Adami & Norton, 1996; Buckner & Flanary, 1996; Burke & Herbert, 1996; Furlong, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Rich, 1992; Sheets, 1996). Research by Search Institute has identified positive experiences and qualities -"developmental assets"- that have a tremendous influence on young people's live. These are the kind of elements that people from all walks of life

can help to nurture. Since 1989, the Search Institute has been studying developmental assets in youth in communities using a survey called Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors. In 1996, the current framework of development assets was released to the general public.

Research by Search Institute, for instance, shows that 40 developmental assets help young people make wise decisions, choose positive paths, and grow up competent, caring, and responsible. The developmental assets (1997) are grouped into eight categories:

1. Support. Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
2. Empowerment. Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
3. Boundaries and expectations. Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."
4. Constructive use of time. Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth

through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home.

5. Commitment to learning. Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
6. Positive values. Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
7. Social competences. Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.
8. Positive identity. Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.

The assets framework is a framework that includes everyone. Families, schools, neighborhoods, congregations, and all organizations can play a role in building assets for youth. Search Institute research has shown that these assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior both protecting young people from many different problem behaviors and promoting positive attitudes and behaviors. These findings are across cultural and socioeconomic groups of youth.

The literature review shows that this is a stream of research that is important for youth development. It is needed to assess the impact of asset building related projects, especially as related to volunteer-driven programs.

Volunteers and School District Partnership

In response to the needs on the non-cognitive dimension at the schools, the school district officials support the SPAVA program. SPAVA is the Society for the Prevention of Aggression and Violence among Adolescents. SPAVA is a volunteer organization that promotes non-violent ways of living, sharing of feelings, respect, honor, integrity, thinking before acting, impulse control and learning to handle stress and anger. The goal is to promote nonviolence as a way of life while empowering the youngsters to be successful and confident as they learn values of respect, honor, and integrity.

The concept and recognition of the need of such an organization began in Louisville, in January 1999. The volunteer talent center formed partnership the Junior League and the Walden Theatre. In October 1999, SPAVA began teaching in seven schools and began to form SPAVA clubs. In February 2000, SPAVA started teaching in 20 schools, with 45 active mentors.

Schools and students are selected upon request. If a school principal sees that a given student or students are exposed to violence and other various at-risk factors, then that administrator may request assistance from the Volunteer Talent Center/SPAVA to promote the spirit of nonviolence/non-aggressiveness in student's daily interactions and/or conflict resolution.

65 volunteer mentors each conduct five-week sessions with entire class or a small group of students at participating schools. The mentors—lawyers, judges, business executives, retirees, and others—led group discussions on conflict resolution and talked with students about famous people such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Ghandi, who have changed the world through peaceful means. Students are encouraged to set goals and to realize that everyone can be good at something, whether it's athletics, medicine, performing arts, or running a household.

SPAVA uses several programs to promote nonviolence. One program is called Second Step, a nonviolence program that meets one day per week using role playing techniques and teaching decision-making. It focuses on empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Another program is called Fantastic Choices, a one-time presentation event

with a follow up. It focuses on personal hygiene, general safety, drug safety, and feelings. SPAVA volunteers meet with students/class teaching non-aggressive ways of handling problems and then help to establish service projects and SPAVA groups/clubs among the students. As a result, the spirit of SPAVA is continuous and self promoted.

Evaluation Objectives and Questions

The evaluation objectives are to conduct a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation of the program. Process evaluation will help to understand the program dynamics and to provide timely quality assurance guidance to the program. Outcome evaluation will help to assess the impact of the program on participants. The overarching evaluation questions that will guide the study are the following:

Process Evaluation

- What is the number of school and students participating in the program?
- What are the characteristics of the participating students in terms of school level, race, gender, lunch status, and family composition?
- What are the students' affective responses to the program (i.e., school attitudes, program-related activities)?

Outcome Evaluation

- What are the teachers' perceptions to the program in terms of cognitive and non-cognitive variables?

Evaluation Model

The Management-Oriented Evaluation Approach

Daniel Stufflebeam (1983; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985) is one of the most reputed leaders on the management-oriented approach. According to Stufflebeam, the evaluation is a process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives. The Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) Evaluation has different objectives, methods, and relation to decision making in the change process depending on the type of evaluation emphasis. The JCPS education leaders have to satisfy their informational needs to make decisions.

> The management-oriented rationale is that the evaluative information is an essential part of good decision-making and that the evaluator can be most effective by serving administrators, policy makers, boards, practitioners, and others who need good evaluative information (Worthen et al., 1997, p. 97).

The UCLA Evaluation Model will be present in the evaluation reporting. The reason is that, although recommendations will be given, the evaluator only

"illuminates" the situation with valuable and timely evaluation information to the decision makers. Klein, Fenstermacher, and Alkin (1971) argue that is not the evaluator role to make final decisions on a program.

Alkin (1991) stated that evaluation is a process of gathering information, the information collected in an evaluation will be use mainly to make decisions about alternative courses of action, and different kinds of decisions require different kinds of evaluation procedures. The evaluation will examine the extent to which the program goals are being achieved and will provide information that might be later used to make improvement decisions regarding the program.

Method

Participating Schools

Table 1 displays the information related to the participating schools. As it can be seen, elementary, middle and high school students participated in the SPAVA program activities. Table 2 shows information related to randomly selected students participating in the program.

Table 1

Participating Schools and Students in SPAVA Across School Level

School Level Number of Students	School Name	Total	
Elementary Schools		225	50%
	A Elementary	28	
	B Elementary	28	
	C Elementary	34	
	D Elementary	24	
	E Elementary	24	
	F Elementary	72	
	G Elementary	15	
Middle Schools		142	32%
	H Middle	25	
	I Middle	18	
	K Middle	30	
	L Middle	10	
	M Middle	30	
	N Middle	29	
High Schools		79	18%
	O High	79	
District		**446**	

Table 2

Profile of Randomly Selected Participating Students (N = 246)

Variable	Frequencies	Percentages
School Level		
Elementary	133	54%
Middle	73	30%
High	40	16%
Race		
Black	106	43%
White	108	44%
Other	32	13%
Gender		
Female	114	46%
Male	132	54%
Lunch Status		
Free	147	60%
Reduced	23	9%
Pay	76	31%
Parents		
Dual parent home	80	33%
Single parent home	166	67%

Data Collection

The data that will be collected include a program activity log, teacher reports, and student surveys. The program activity log will be kept to have all the services documented. The teachers will provide reports about non-cognitive and cognitive dimensions of project participants on a monthly basis. The students will participate in a survey that measures students' attitudes toward school, their feelings toward safety during school, their interest in homework, and their satisfaction with the program activities.

Overall, the different data collection mechanisms will provide opportunities to the participating students and teachers to make suggestions for program improvement. Finally, the project coordinator will collect "success stories" to share with the school staff and parents.

Data Analysis

The project coordinator works with the program evaluator to collect, analyze, and disseminate the information on program operations and outcomes. The evaluation design is pre- and post-measurement using reflexive controls (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999). The data analysis will include basically descriptive statistics (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1994). The evaluation results

will be converted to a power point presentation and used to promote support for the program in the school and community.

Results

Process Evaluation

- What are the students' affective responses to the program?

Overall, the program exhibit positive results in both cognitive and non-cognitive areas as well as in terms of satisfaction with program activities. Table 3 displays the student survey results.

Table 3

Randomly Selected Student Survey Results (N = 180)

	Part 1	% Agree
1	I look forward to coming to school.	93%
2	I have respect for my teachers and classmates.	97%
3	It works better to yell or hit someone than to talk when you are mad at them.	4%
4	The choices I make now affect my future.	89%
	Part 2	**% Agree**
1	I like the SPAVA activities.	94%
2	During the past month, I looked forward to participating in the SPAVA activities.	91%
3	I felt comfortable talking to the SPAVA mentor.	91%
4	I learned a lot from the SPAVA mentor.	93%
5	I am going to try to do better in school after participating in SPAVA.	95%

Outcome Evaluation

- What are the teachers' perceptions to the program?

In the schools that teachers had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire, the results showed an overall positive impact on students. Table 3 present the results of the completed teacher survey were SPAVA program activities were held.

Table 4

Teacher Survey Results (N = 13 Teachers)

Over the past month, have the students in your class:

	Item of the Teacher Questionnaire	% Agree
1	Improved in turning in homework on time?	85%
2	Improved in completing homework to your satisfaction?	85%
3	Improved in class participation?	92%
4	Improved in volunteering?	85%
5	Improved in attending class regularly?	85%
6	Improved in being attentive in class?	85%
7	Improved in behaving well in class?	92%
8	Had classroom academic performance that was satisfactory or better?	85%
9	Improved in coming to school ready/prepared to learn?	85%
10	Improved in showing respect for teachers and fellow students?	92%
11	Showed improvement in her/his ability to resolve conflict and manage anger?	92%

Discussion

Why do some kids grow up with ease while others struggle? Why do some kids get involved in dangerous activities, while others spend their time contributing to society? Why do some youth "beat the odds" in difficult situations while others get trapped? Many factors influence why some young people have successes in life and why others have failures in life. Some of the factors, the non-genetic factors, can be changed if (a) everyone build assets from early childhood to adulthood; (b) young people are given assistance; (c) assets building is an on-going process; and, (d) consistent messages are given by families, schools, and communities. Assets must be continually re-enforced across the years and in all areas of a young person's life (Search Institute, 1997).

SPAVA is a volunteer organization that promotes non-violent ways of living, sharing of feelings, respect, honor, integrity, thinking before acting, impulse control and learning to handle stress and anger. The goal is to promote nonviolence as a way of life while empowering the youngsters to be successful and confident as they learn values of respect, honor, and integrity.

The participating students were students facing barriers to learning in multiple ways, being the most

prominent the poverty level. According to previous research in the district under examination, there is a strong relationship between student socio-economic status as measured by free/reduced lunch participation and student achievement (Munoz & Dossett, 2001).

If we add to these equation, that most of these students were living in single-parent homes and scored in the first three stanines on standardized tests, that further confirms the levels of complexity faced by them to be successful in school and life. Students with behavior problems eventually drop out of school and put themselves in a long-term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens.

The benefits of the program activities are observed when participating students and teacher expressed their perceptions about different dimensions related to their educational endeavors. In general, both group of stakeholders (i.e., students and teachers) like the program.

Probably, the professional development for the volunteers and the duration of the program are two key issues to consider for program improvement. Fewer schools, but for a longer period of time might have a stronger impact on student non-cognitive measures. According to a

recent study, students who participated in a 13-session peaceful conflict resolution and violence prevention curriculum reported a decrease in their use of violence and intentions to use violence by middle school students from pretest to post-test (DuRant, 2001). The dosage of intervention is limited in time and duration; however, if the program goals are met, long-term benefits might be expressed in the student life as they continue their schooling and as they will become productive citizens.

In the future, it is important to continue targeting the most needy schools based on behavioral data available in the district. Also, this evaluation research was conducted based on available survey data. Not all schools completed the instruments designed for data collection.

If the program is focused on the needy schools and for a longer period of time (i.e., dosage), it will be clever from a research perspective to be able to conduct a sample study of participating students looking at their non-cognitive measures on a pre-post design (i.e., out-of-school suspensions). Furthermore, if deemed possible, a quasi-experimental pretest posttest control group design would be useful for evaluating the violence prevention curriculum among sixth-grade middle school students.

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Appendices

Student Survey Part I
Society for the Prevention of Aggression and Violence among
Adolescents (SPAVA)

Give Part I to student participants before or immediately after they join the program. Give Parts I and II to students at the end of the program activity.

Name:_____

Grade/School:_____

Instructions:
Read the following statements below. If you think the statement is true, place a check in the space under YES. If you think the statement is false, place a check in the space under NO.

	Yes	No
I look forward to coming to school.		
I have respect for my teachers and classmates.		
It works better to yell or hit someone than to talk when you are mad at them.		
The choices I make now affect my future.		

Student Survey Part II
Society for the Prevention of Aggression and Violence among Adolescents (SPAVA)

Give part II to student participants at the end of the program activity.

Name: _____

Grade/School: _____

Thanks for participating in SPAVA! We'd like to know what you thoughts about it. Please fill out all parts of this survey so we know if you enjoyed the SPAVA activities and to know what you thought about the quality of SPAVA.

Instructions:
Read the following statements below. If you think the statement is true, place a check in the space under YES. If you think the statement is false, place a check in the space under NO.

	Yes	No
I liked the SPAVA activities.		
During the past month, I looked forward to participate in the SPAVA activities.		
I felt comfortable talking to the SPAVA mentor.		
I learned a lot from the SPAVA mentor.		
I am going to try to do better in school after participating in SPAVA.		

Teacher Survey
Society for the Prevention of Aggression and Violence among Adolescents (SPAVA)

Grade/School:_____

_____

Instructions:
Please check the following items based on what you have observed and experienced during the past month while SPAVA was working in your classroom.

Over the past month, has the students in your class...	Yes	No
Improved in turning in homework on time?		
Improved in completing homework to your satisfaction?		
Improved in class participation?		
Improved in volunteering (e.g., for more responsibilities/activities)?		
Improved in attending class regularly?		
Improved in being attentive in class?		
Improved in behaving well in class?		
Had classroom academic performance that was satisfactory or better?		
Improved in coming to school ready/prepared to learn?		
Improved in showing respect for teachers and fellow students?		
Showed improvement in her/his ability to resolve conflict and manage anger?		

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